



File Code: 1950

Date: December 17, 2008

Bull Creek and Upper Silver Creek Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management

Dear Reviewer:

The USDA Forest Service is proposing to designate routes for public, motorized wheeled-vehicle travel on the Emmett Ranger District of the Boise National Forest. This proposal focuses entirely on the “E” Travel Management Area (“E” areas) within the Bull Creek and upper portion of the Silver Creek drainages. Figure 1 shows the vicinity of the project area on the District and Forest. A decision specific to this project area will be made through NEPA analysis.

Particularly heightened public interest in motorized access on the Bull Creek Trail 102 and Silver Creek trail 044 within these drainages has been identified. To better respond to public input and develop more meaningful alternatives, a separate proposed action for this area has been developed.

Purpose and Need For This Project

There are two primary reasons for this project. The first is the need to be compliant with recent regulations addressing motorized access on National Forests and National Grasslands. The second is to address trail concerns and reroute options specific to the Bull Creek and upper portion of the Silver Creek drainage.

Need 1: Motor Vehicle Travel Rule

In 2004, the Chief of the Forest Service cited four major threats to National Forest System (NFS) lands. One of these threats included “unmanaged outdoor recreation”. To address this issue, the Forest Service developed a national strategy to evaluate recreational motor vehicle use on NFS lands. The strategy would work toward resolving issues such as damage to wetlands, wildlife habitat and fragile soils, disturbance to wildlife, spread of noxious weeds, and conflicts between recreationists. Following a national public comment process, this strategy was then formalized as new national travel management regulations and published as a “final rule” in the Federal Register in 2005. Revised Travel Management Rule directives were published in the Federal Register on December 9, 2008 to become effective on January 8, 2009.

The final rule, entitled, “*Travel Management - Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use*,” became effective in December 2005 and revises several regulations to require designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use on National Forests and National Grasslands. To meet the direction and intent of the final Motor Vehicle Travel Use Rule (MVUR), every National Forest and Grassland unit is to develop or revise their travel management plan for motorized vehicle use by 2009.



Highlights of the Travel Management Rule are:

1. Each National Forest or Ranger District is to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles.
2. Designation will include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use.
3. Once the designation process is complete, the rule will prohibit motor vehicle use off the designated system or use that is inconsistent with the designations.
4. Designation decisions will be made locally, with public input and in coordination with state, local, and tribal governments.

Currently, motorized wheeled-vehicle travel on the Emmett Ranger District within “C” Travel Management areas (west side of the District) is designated to specific roads and trails and no action is needed to comply with the MVUR. However, within “E” areas on the Emmett Ranger District, motorized, wheeled-vehicle use is allowed on both established, but currently unauthorized, routes as well as on Forest Service designated routes. To comply with the MVUR in this area, designation of roads and trails for motorized, wheeled-vehicle use is required.

Application of the MVUR would result in a fundamental change in motorized travel management across the Emmett Ranger District. In the simplest of terms, application of the MVUR would change the existing motorized travel management situation from one of being “open for motor vehicle use, unless specifically ordered and posted as closed” to one of “closed for motor vehicle use, unless specifically designated and mapped as open.” This change is consistent with the national policies of the Forest Service. Application of the MVUR would enhance the Forest Service’s ability to inform, manage, and administer motorized wheeled-vehicle uses on the Emmett Ranger District.

Need 2: Trail Concerns Within the Bull Creek and Silver Creek Drainages

The Bull Creek and the upper portion of the Silver Creek drainages are currently accessible by utilizing the motorcycle trail at the east and west end of the Bull Creek Trail #102 or the Stratton Creek trail #010 or by motor vehicles 50” or less on the Silver Creek Summit Trail #044. No loop opportunity exists for motorized vehicles 50” or less. The Silver Creek Summit Trail connects to the Bull Creek Trail and provides approximately 13.6 miles of trail for vehicles 50” or less. Because of these opportunities, and the proximity to recreation areas in Silver Creek and the Middle Fork Payette River, these trails are very popular. In addition, the Silver Creek Summit and Bull Creek Trails are unique because of the access for vehicles 50” or less to roadless area. As a result, these trails are also popular during the hunting season.

I have been concerned about the sustainability of motorized recreation use on these two trails. The Silver Creek Summit Trail has been rerouted several times to avoid steep sections and

reduce erosion. Erosion control structures have also been installed in the trail and were partially effective in reducing erosion, but have since washed out. Additional reroutes to avoid steep sections are included in this proposed action. The designated motorcycle route at the east end of the Bull Creek trail is difficult to find and the public has developed numerous unauthorized routes leading to the ridge and to Rice Peak. Many of the unauthorized routes occur in steep sections and concerns for soil erosion exist. Finally, in mid sections of the Bull Creek Trail are often several inches under water during late spring and early summer. When used in this condition, erosion and impacts to surrounding vegetation have occurred.

Approximately 3 years ago, a small portion of the Silver Creek Summit Trail washed out. I had an immediate concern for public safety and closed the trail to all public use until safety issues could be resolved. At that same time, I directed my staff to evaluate options for rerouting the Silver Creek Summit Trail away from steep sections and to provide a trail design that was more sustainable. I also evaluated the class of motorized use on the trail. During this period, the trail remained closed to public motorized wheeled-vehicle use in an effort to stabilize areas that had experienced erosion. In the fall of 2008, I opened the trail to motorcycles only.

Decision to be Made Within the Bull Creek and Upper Portions of the Silver Creek Drainages:

The following decisions will be made within the Bull Creek and upper portions of the Silver Creek drainages:

1. Designate those trails open to motor vehicles including the class of vehicle and if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use.
2. Designate a reroute of the Silver Creek Summit Trail that avoids steep sections.

Enclosed for your review is the Forest Service's Proposed Action for the management of public, motorized wheeled-vehicle travel within the Bull Creek and upper portions of the Silver Creek drainage.

In this package you will find the following:

1. A table that summarizes and compares the Current Situation and the Proposed Action regarding the amount and type of motorized travel opportunities within the "E" Travel Management Area.
2. Figure 2, titled "**Current Motor Vehicle Use**", which displays the current system of motorized routes in the project area. Figure 3, titled "**Proposed Action Motor Vehicle Use**", which displays the motorized routes that would result if the proposed action was implemented.
3. A proposed Action narrative document which contains a detailed description of each proposed change in motor vehicle use designation.

4. A narrative document which displays the public comments received to date and a Forest Service response.

The proposed action was developed to address the concerns identified above and respond to public input received throughout this past summer. I personally reviewed each comment received in response to our public outreach. In addition, I, along with my staff, visited every one of the trails and many of the unauthorized, routes to personally assess how they are being used and what opportunities or issues exist.

I recognize that because of the popularity of these trails, trail closures and restrictions implemented over the last several years have been unpopular. I also recognize that travel management planning in this area could be contentious. Public input received thus far indicates that expectations for this area are polarized. Because of this, it is my expectation to develop several alternatives to the proposed action that address a variety of options for access. It is my hope that I will be able to develop a meaningful dialogue with you such that each comment provided is recognized and considered.

To aid public understanding and review of the proposed action, I have scheduled three open house public meetings in January, where Forest Service employees will be available to discuss the proposed action and provide the opportunity for detailed map reviews and address questions. The following are the details for each of the three open houses:

Emmett – January 6 at 7 p.m. at the Emmett Ranger District Office in Emmett
Garden Valley – January 7 at 7 p.m. at the Crouch Community Hall
Boise – January 8 at 7 p.m. at the Best Western Vista Inn, 2645 Airport Way

Public comments on the proposed action are welcomed and encouraged and will be used to evaluate the proposed action and alternative options for consideration. Comments will be most helpful if they address some of the concerns resource identified in this letter, provide specific changes to the proposed action you think are needed, explain why those changes should be made and how such a change would better meet your interests and the resources in the area. Comments submitted by January 26, 2009, will be most beneficial. Comments submitted in writing should be addressed to the Emmett Ranger District, 1806 Highway 16, Room 5, Emmett, Idaho 83617. Comments may also be sent via e-mail to comments-intermtn-boise-mtn-home@fs.fed.us. Please put “Bull Creek/Silver Creek Motor Vehicle Travel Proposal” in the subject line of e-mail comments. Further information is available by calling the Emmett Ranger District at 365-7000 or by visiting the Boise National Forest web site at <http://fs.usda.gov/boise>.

Sincerely,

/s/ John R. Erickson
JOHN R. ERICKSON
District Ranger

Enclosures

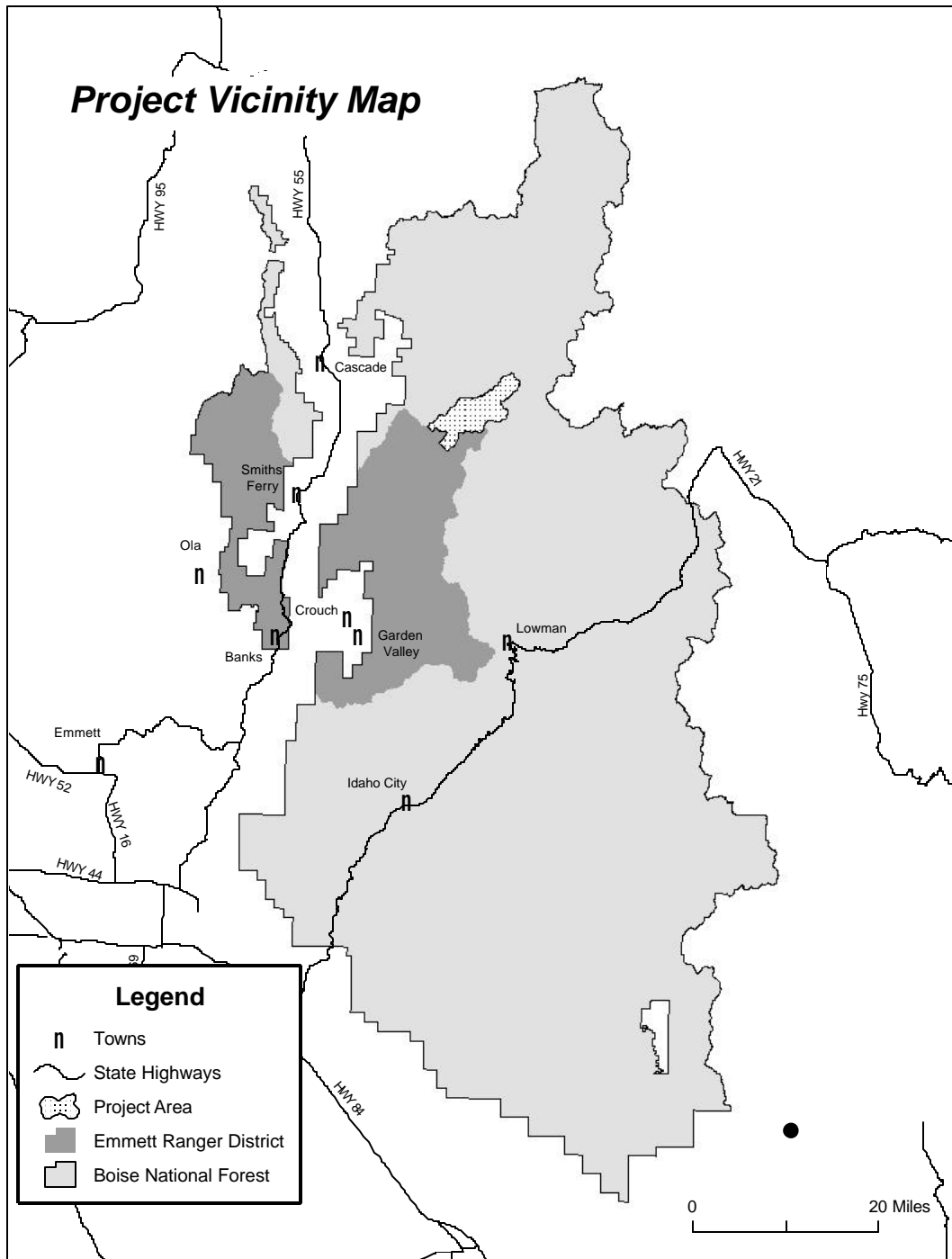


Figure 1. Project Boundary for the Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management Decision for the Bull Creek and Upper Portion of the Silver Creek Drainage.

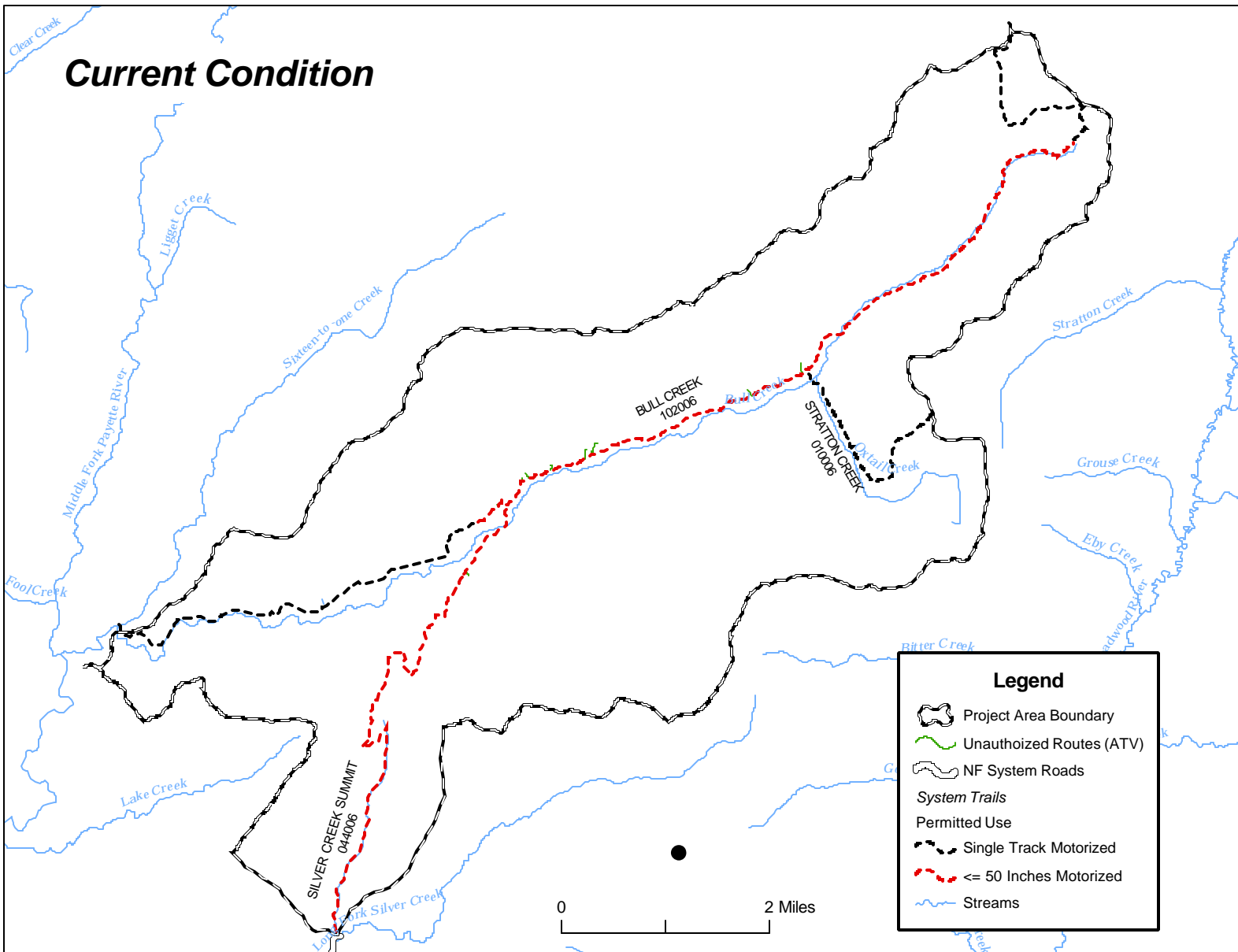


Figure 2. Motorized wheeled vehicle current condition in the Bull Creek – Silver Creek project area.

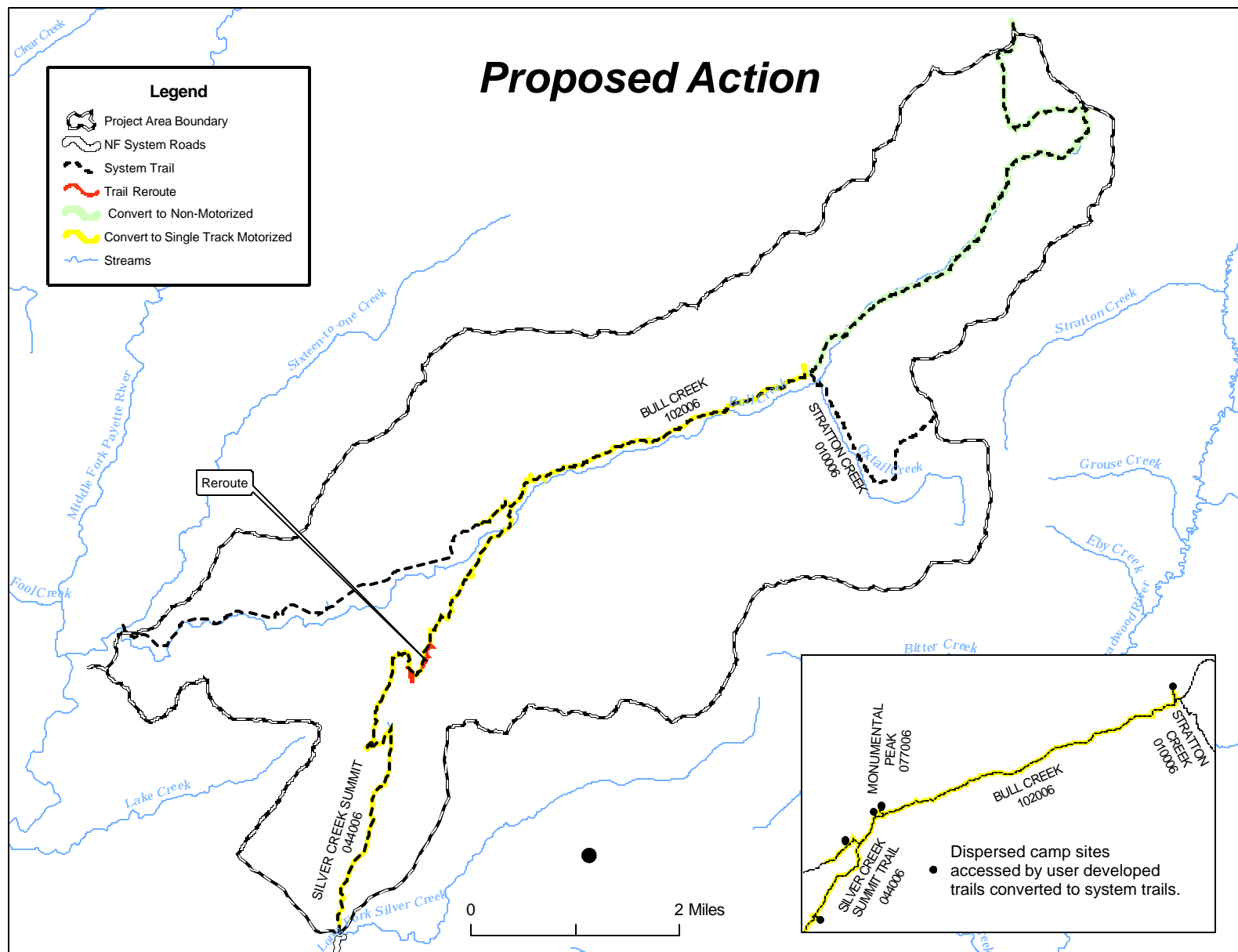


Figure 3. Proposed action for motorized vehicle use in the Bull Creek and upper portion of the Silver Creek drainage.

“E” Area Travel Management Area Motorized Route Summary

Type of Route	Current Condition (Miles)	Proposed Action (Miles)
Silver Creek Summit Trail (044)		
1. Designated open to vehicles less than 50 inches	6.03	0
2. Designated open to motorcycles only	0	6.03
Bull Creek Trail (102)		
1. Designated open to vehicles less than 50 inches	7.6	0
2. Designated open to motorcycles only	6.6	8.0
Stratton Creek Trail (010)		
1. Designated open to vehicles less than 50 inches	0	0
2. Designated open to motorcycles only	2.4*	2.4
Unauthorized Routes		
	.7	.3
Total	23.3	17

NFS – National Forest System Route – a road or trail that is currently part of the official Forest Service transportation System.

UnAuthorized Route – A road or trail that is not a forest road or trail or temporary road or trail and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas (Motor Vehicle Use Rule, 2005).

* A portion of the Stratton Creek trail crosses over to the Lowman Ranger District and is not part of this proposed action and these miles are not displayed in the table above.

**Bull Creek and Upper Silver Creek Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management
Emmett Ranger District – Boise National Forest**

The proposed action would do the following:

NFS Trail System	Location	Proposed Action
044 Trail	Silver Creek Summit Trail	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This would change the current designation of open to motor vehicles less than 50” to motorcycle only with a spring seasonal closure until the trail dried. (6 miles)
102 Trail	Lower portion of the Bull Creek Trail	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This would maintain the current designation from the MF Payette River east to approximately 1 mile from the junction with the Silver Creek Summit trail (044) (4.2 miles).
102 Trail	Bull Creek Trail from 1 mile west of the Junction with Silver Creek Summit Trail east to the junction with the Stratton Creek Trail (010)	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This section of the trail would be changed from open to motor vehicles less than 50 inches to motorcycles only with a seasonal closure until the trail dried. (3.8 miles).
102 Trail	Bull Creek Trail from the Stratton Creek Trail junction east to Rice Peak.	Un-designate for all motorized use. This section of the trail would be changed from open to motor vehicles less than 50 inches to non-motorized use (3.7 miles).
102 Trail	Bull Creek Trail from Rice Peak west.	Un-designate for all motorized use. This section of the trail would be changed from motor cycle only to non-motorized use (2.4 miles).

NFS Trail System	Location	Proposed Action
044 Trail Spur	Spur access to dispersed camping site near the bridge over Bull Creek.	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This is a section of unauthorized trail off of the Silver Creek Summit Trail provides access to an existing dispersed camping site.
102 trail Spur	Spur access to a dispersed camping site about ½ east of the Bull Creek Trail/Silver Creek Trail junction.	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This is a section of unauthorized trail off of the Bull Creek Trail.
102 Trail Spur	Spur providing access to a dispersed camping site off of the Bull Creek Trail	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This is a section of unauthorized trail off of the Bull Creek Trail.
102 Trail Spur	Spur providing access to a dispersed camping site near the junction of the Bull Creek Trail with the Stratton Creek Trail.	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This is a section of unauthorized trail off of the Bull Creek Trail.
102 Trail Spur	Spur off of the Bull Creek Trail.	Designate as a trail for use by motorcycles only. This is a section of unauthorized trail off of the Bull Creek Trail.

**Bull Creek-Upper Portion of Silver Creek
Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Comment Summary
Emmett Ranger District – Boise National Forest**

Below are the substantive comments received during the initial public input phase for the development of a Proposed Action for motorized vehicle travel within the “E” Travel Management Areas on the Emmett Ranger District and the Forest Service response. The comments are largely unedited except where clarity was needed. Similar comments have been groups where possible.

Site Specific Comments	Forest Service Response
I would like to address the Bull Creek Trail. I think the idea of a “loop” trail is a great idea. Re-routing a few sections would be okay as well.	The proposed action does not provide a “loop” opportunity for vehicles 50” or less. The Proposed Action does provide a loop opportunity to the Deadwood drainage and to the Middle Fork Payette drainage. Additional opportunities will be addressed through development of alternatives to the proposed action.
I formally request the Silver Creek Summit Trail (044) and the Bull Creek Trail (102) be included in at least one Alternative as an open motorized trail for vehicles 50” or less.	Public comments on the proposed action or desired alternatives will be used to develop alternatives to this proposed action. An alternative assessing access for motorized vehicles less than 50” will be developed and analyzed.
I also request that at least one Alternative include an option to construct a new trail which connects with these trails to the Stratton Creek Trail (010) in order to make a loop opportunity.	Public comments on the proposed action or desired alternatives will be used to develop alternatives to this proposed action. An alternative assessing access for motorized vehicles less than 50” will be developed and analyzed.
Bull Creek Trail 044, 102 (Silver Creek Summit Trail) – I’d love to see this narrowed down for two wheeled travel only.	The proposed action changes the current 2 track access on these trails to single track motorized access. Alternatives that allow access to vehicles 50” or less will also be considered.
Because of my age, my ability to enjoy the Boise National Forest has become dependent on motorized access. Closing areas to motorized use effectively eliminates my ability to enjoy those areas I’ve used in the past.	Many of the comments have expressed the need for motorized access to this area. An alternative will be developed and evaluated that includes providing motorized access for vehicles 50” or less.
Motorized recreation opportunities, especially ATV access to dispersed campsites, have been significantly reduced throughout the region.	Dispersed campsites along the Bull Creek and Silver Creek Summit Trail have been identified. The proposed action identifies access to several dispersed sites by motorcycles only.
The Bull Creek Trail (#102) is designated for ATV use in the current travel plan. The trail was not designed for ATV use. ATV use has caused significant damage to the trail tread. Hunters using ATVs have created numerous non-system routes into the drainage.	The Proposed Action designates this trail for motorcycle use only.

Site Specific Comments	Forest Service Response
The Silver Creek Trail (#044) is also designated for ATV use. A washout has prevented ATVs from using the trail on the Bull Creek side of the summit. The entire trail (should) be designated for single-tack motorized use.	The proposed action designates this trail for motorcycle use only.
The Silver Creek Trail #044 and the Bull Creek Trail #102 should be converted back to a motorcycle-only trail.	The proposed action designated these trails for motorcycle use only.
In my opinion, Mother Nature is starting to take her Bull Creek Trail back. The erosion that the Forest Service is talking about is just what is needed to limit the number of users on this trail.	A concern for trail erosion and providing sustainable recreation access is a concern.
I understand that you may be the one to talk to about the possible closure of the Bull Creek Trail. If this is the case, I would like to let you know how important this trail has been to my family and friends. I have been using this trail since 1996 for the purposed of recreation and hunting.	The popularity of both of these trails is recognized.
Yes, I have noticed degradation of the trail and noticed some rerouting at bog areas but I am left to wonder if the cause of this is lack of maintenance of the trail. I have been involved in the outdoors with motor vehicles all my life, and yes, they can cause various damage to areas prone to that but I have found that with forward thinking and maintenance most damage can be minimized.	Maintenance is a key component of trail management. The goal is to have a trail that is sustainable.
This trail (Silver Creek Summit Trail #044) is adjacent to two streams and does not form a loop system. In conjunction with trail 102, the ATV route ends at the District boundary. Recommend non-motorized designation.	Effects to water quality and fish habitat will be assessed. The proposed action designates these trails for motorcycle only.
This trail is adjacent to bull trout habitat in Bull Creek and leads to the Middle Fork. Bull Creek is spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout. Recommend non-motorized designation.	Effects to water quality and fish habitat will be assessed. The proposed action designates these trails for motorcycle only.